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Impartial Enquiry

INTO THE
MORAL CHARACTER
O F
JESUS CHRIST:

Wherein he is considered as a
PHILOSOPHER.
IN A
LETTER to a FRIEND.

Scilicet uni Aequus virtuti, atque ejus amicis.

HOR. Sat. I. L. 2.



L O N D O N :

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Important Enquiry

INTO THE

MORAL CHARACTER

OF

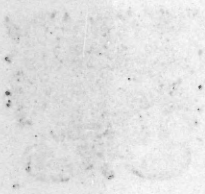
JESUS CHRIST

BY

PHILIP HENRY

IN A

LETTER TO A FRIEND.



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A N

Impartial Enquiry, &c.

YOU thought, my Friend, I became grave, in a late conversation, and are, it seems, afraid you may have offended me by your freedom. I know what fired you; for that you was warm, you seem now to be convinced: But I have gained so much instruction by free conferences with you about religion, that instead of being angry at any thing that happened on your part, I long excessively for another on the same subject, between you and believers, but of a more moderate turn; should I say of a temper more like the master they pretend to be zealous for, I am sure you would join with me; for I have often heard you commend his behaviour to the Sadducees and other unbelievers, and own he never shewed anger but against hypocrisy and superstitious zeal. Indeed what I have often said to you on other occasions, I think I have now better reason than ever to affirm. 'Tis what our Saviour said to the lawyer, who having asked which was the first commandment of all, approved the answer Jesus gave to him, saying, Thou hast said the truth, for there is one God, and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love my neighbour as myself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. The reply was this, Jesus when he saw he answered discreetly, said unto him, *Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.* To

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you who are firmly persuaded of this great and important truth, without which revelation hath nothing to build upon, and must therefore be an empty sound: "That the sure and sole way of pleasing God, or recommending ourselves to his favour here or hereafter, is by the sincere study and practice of virtue:" To you who sincerely believe this truth, the same character is applicable, you are *not far from the kingdom of heaven*; you are almost a Christian, *i. e.* whether you be a Christian or not, you are a good man; you are sound in the fundamentals; for if religion be not a mere sound, that truth must be fundamental.

Was it not to this purpose you run on for some time t'other night, after we had been entertained with a great deal of panegyric upon certain modern apologists for Christianity, and very much heat, to give it no worse name, against those who resisted the evidence; for no allowance was made even to weakness of understanding, but wilful prejudiced opposition was taken for granted to be the only possible case.—Was it not much to this effect you put an end to the arguments, tho' not to the zeal of your opponents. "Did Christ give any reason to prove he was sent of God or not? If he did not, I know not where we should look for, or expect to find reasons to shew he was. And if he did, why have divines taken such various routs in their very laboured and subtle reasonings about the matter? Why don't they directly produce his own argument, and shew it to be good? For my own part, I never met with any apologist for Christianity who would not be very angry if his apology was not thought intirely his own invention. This is new, says one. None hath taken this method, says another. This alone, says a third, is the true, the solid argument. Who, pray, amongst them all says this is Christ's own argument; and if it be not good,

good, in vain do we look out for any other. Divines serve revelation as philosophers long served nature. It was with the greatest difficulty the latter were at last persuaded to go to nature herself to learn from her how she operates, tho' nothing be more evident, than that all philosophy she herself does not teach and confirm by experience, however ingenious it may be, is but romance and conjecture. The case is the same with regard to the doctrine of Christ. They go to their invention, they go to Aristotle, or to Plato, they go every-where to find it but where alone it can be found. Yet it is not more certain, that philosophers cannot spin the knowledge of nature out of their brains, or get at it any other way than by studying nature herself, than it is, that if Divines do not fetch both the doctrine of Christ, and its proofs, from Christ himself, *i. e.* from those who have given us the history of his life, doctrine and works, it is by mere chance, if they hit either upon the true doctrine, or the real evidence that was given of its truth. Pray what title can I have to the name of a Christian, if I do not take both my faith, and the grounds of my faith from the teacher himself in whom I profess to believe? If you would prove Christianity to me therefore, you must shew me which way Christ himself reasoned to prove his mission and the truth of his doctrine. I am indeed at no small loss to find out what one can gain by believing Christianity, who is already persuaded that the sincere practice of virtue is the only way of serving or pleasing God; that a revelation which places religion in any thing else, must be false; and that a true one can say no more to us about the matter.— This principle being certain, I cannot easily, I say, find out what great advantage one who is persuaded of it can reap from any revelation. But however that be, if you would make a Christian of me, shew me plainly how Christ

himself reasoned, to evince the truth of his pretension. If his argument be good, I promise you I will yield to it ; that is, I will freely own I am convinced by it. But if you can produce no reasoning that is his, why should I trouble myself with the apologies for Christianity of those who came after him, the best of which are owned to be no older than this or the last century ; unless you can prove to me that one may be sent of God, and yet either offer no reason at all, or which is more unaccountable still, very bad and inconclusive arguments to prove his mission, neither of which hath any one, I think, been so absurd as to assert."

To this effect did you, Sir, express yourself. And I think the way to satisfy you is, 1. To develop to you the argument he himself brought to prove his divine mission and the truth of his doctrine ; In order to which, I must first of all give you a clear view of his doctrine. 2^{dly}, To shew that Christianity does not place religion in any thing else but the sincere practice of virtue, which will appear from a faithful representation of his doctrine. And yet, 3^{dly}, That there are several great advantages arising from the belief of the Christian doctrine, even to those who are already persuaded of this truth, without laying which down as a first principle, there are no principles to reason from about true or false revelation, viz. That virtue, and it alone, can recommend us to the divine favour. All these I think I can prove. But if you can shew me what I take to be a good proof of any of them not to be so, I shall be obliged to you. For what others say of Plato, Aristotle, and other great names, I am not afraid to carry farther, and say, " Nothing is sacred to me but truth." If Christ had not good reason to say of himself, *I am the truth*, he hath no title to our regard.

But you have often said, that the first question of
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ail in this enquiry ought to be, " What was Christ's moral character." Let us therefore, before we enter upon any of these arguments, consider Christ merely as a Philosopher, and enquire into his character as a man. In vain, certainly, is it to talk of his coming or not coming from God with a special commission, till we are sure he was a good man. It concerns us very little how much he knew, or what mighty works he did, till we are fully satisfied he was a thoroughly honest, candid and benevolent person. 'Tis goodness alone that can create or lay any foundation for trust. If he was not a most perfect example of genuine piety and virtue, he cannot possibly be proved, by any argument from prophecies, miracles, or whatever other consideration, to have been entrusted by God with the declaration of his will to mankind. To imagine so, is to fancy God could make a very odd choice of a messenger; for to say no worse of it, it would be to make a choice that could not fail to puzzle, not to say scandalize all lovers of virtue, and all believers of providence. Let us therefore, first of all, consider Christ merely as a man, or enquire into his moral character, and consider his works, which are called miracles, barely as acts of ordinary skill and power, to cure diseases, and perform other such good offices to mankind.

Now, it is no small presumption in favour of his pretension, when it is taken in the highest sense, that we find him reasoning in this manner himself, and telling those to whom he appeared, " That the first thing they ought to do, when any one comes to them, boasting of extraordinary gifts, or of a special message from heaven, is to search carefully and impartially into his moral character." He lays down this rule in general, with regard to all pretenders to prophecy, and with respect to himself he often puts the whole stress of his claim upon this
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single point, the moral tendency of his doctrine, the goodness of his life, and the beneficialness of his works.

Such language, it must be owned, hath not the air of an impostor. But lest it should be said, impostors must talk in this strain, and counterfeit a shew of benevolence and candour to gain a hearing; let us see whether we can discover any one feature of a deceiver in him, any motive or view that gives the least ground for suspicion, any cunning or chicanery, any double dealing; or any sinister address that favours, in the smallest degree, of any other design but that of teaching men true religion and virtue, and shewing them an example of it. Let us judge here as we ought always to judge, *i. e.* according to all appearances fairly laid together and impartially considered. For surely no reasonable person will say, he may have been dishonest, tho' there be no symptom of his not having been thoroughly honest and virtuous. We do not say so of Socrates, Confucius, or any other philosopher. And not to pronounce like conclusions in like cases, is certainly partiality.

What you use to call *the previous question*, in an enquiry about the truth of Christianity, cannot be more strongly represented to be such than it is by Jesus Christ. Let me give you his reasoning at some length, for it will at the same time serve for a specimen of his elegant and apposite use of figures, or allegory. A successful manner of instilling truth of every kind, reproof in particular, into prejudiced minds, practised by the most renowned sages of antiquity, and approved by all critics, in which Christ eminently excelled.

“ Beware of false prophets *, which come to you in sheep’s cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Attend carefully to them, to their conduct and

* Matt. vii. 15.

and to their doctrines. And ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. And every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits shall ye discern impostors, who have sensual or ambitious designs, from those whose only aim is to preach the will of our heavenly Father; his eternal immutable will, even moral rectitude, or sanctity of heart and life: Without this it is impossible to please him: And he who teacheth any other doctrine, teacheth not the will of God. They who place religion in external rites and ceremonies, or in any thing else but mercy, truth, and goodness, teach for the *doctrine of God the commandments of men*, and supplant true religion, or *make it of no effect*, by their *vain traditions*. But every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted out. I am come to root it out, and truth shall at last prevail against falsehood and error." To this purpose does our Saviour reason about true religion, and the principal test that ought to be applied to such as pretend to declare the will of God to mankind. We are, according to this rule laid down by him, to pay no regard to boasts of knowledge and power, till we have first strictly canvassed the life and character of the pretender. And accordingly, in urging his divine commission, he appeals to the daily hearers of his doctrine, and witnesses of his actions; nay, to his most inveterate enemies and opposers, in this manner: " * Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the Truth, why do you not believe me? I appeal to your own consciences, whether you do not oppose me because

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* John viii. 46.

I will not tell you lies, suit my doctrines to your lusts and passions, and flatter you in your sensual and corrupt practices, but tell you the truth, pure and spiritual truth, or the necessity of purity of heart and manners to please God. If I have done any thing that makes me unworthy of your belief, if my conduct be not strictly conformable to the piety and virtue I teach, why doth not some of you convict me of it? This would quickly put me to silence, as it would effectually destroy the principal argument I have to offer for my doctrine and mission. But on the other hand, if my doctrine be worthy of belief; if it have all the internal characters of true and reasonable, and if my behaviour be congruous to it, what reason can you alledge for not receiving and believing me? I will tell you a very plain and certain truth, *He that is of God beareth God's words: Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God, i. e.* He who hath just conceptions of God, and a disposition of mind suitable to them, can easily distinguish whether a doctrine be of God or not. But ye refuse to hear me, because ye have not the sincere, candid and virtuous temper of mind which is necessary to understand and relish divine truths; and ye have imbibed false conceptions of God and of religion. Ye have been taught and inured to place religion not in spiritual worship and true goodness, but in superstitious or ritual observances: And ye will not hear me, because I tell you God is a spirit, who ought to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; and that no worship can be acceptable to him but that which comes from a pure heart. In vain do ye think to honour God by your lips †, if ye deny him by your works."

Upon another occasion, Jesus Christ likewise appeals to his life and actions in the most affecting convincive manner. When the Jews took up stones to

† Matt. xv. 7, 8. &c.

to stone him, “ Jesus said to them †, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father, for which of those works do ye stone me ?” There is not only an air of composure and calmness of mind in this defence, which is truly admirable ; but there is pleasant irony in it. And indeed, as we shall see afterwards, Jesus Christ greatly excelled in that irony which hath been so fully explained, and at the same time so highly commended by ancients and moderns, in drawing the character of Socrates, the best of mere philosophers. The Jews falling again into a great rage, took up stones to cast at Jesus. Jesus did not run away, nor was he at all disturbed ; but with the greatest presence of mind, asks them in a very pleasant manner, What just provocation have I given you, that you should thus tumultuously attempt to stone me ? What work have I done among you that was not for your benefit and advantage ? I have fed the hungry, I have healed the lame, I have given sight to the blind, I have cured all sorts of diseases, and I have raised the dead. For which now of these good works is it that you are so angry, that you go about to take away my life ?

Thus did Jesus Christ defend himself when he was most outrageously affronted, abused and persecuted. ’Twas to his moral character, or to the goodness and sincerity of his life and actions, as well as the purity and reasonableness of his doctrine, he continually and solely appealed.

So that the rule you lay down for trying Christ by, is really Christ’s own rule. It cannot be recommended or inculcated in stronger terms than it is by him on several occasions. And is not his insisting so openly, so frequently, and zealously upon this rule, this test, a very strong presumption that he was not afraid of it, a very strong presumption

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† John x. 32.

tion that his life and character could stand the severest scrutiny, the most narrow inspection. 'Tis indeed as he expresses it, the works of darkness only that fear or shun the light, which maketh all things manifest. Truth and sincere goodness, like beauty, do not avoid the light, but cheerfully come to it. For as it detects the deformity of vice and error, so it sets forth the native charms of truth and virtue. "Every one* that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that loveth and doth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God, that they are such as God approves."

Having mentioned the pleasant irony for which Socrates is so highly extolled, suffer me, before I go further, to bring some other instances of our Saviour's prudent and apposite use of this admirable art. They will likewise serve to clear the point we have chiefly in view, his moral and philosophical character, in the same manner as that of Socrates is illustrated and justified, by instances of the proper moral use he made of his wonderful talent for raillery or pleasantry.

When Jesus was teaching the people in the temple †, the chief priests, pharisees and scribes, whose superstition and hypocrisy he was ever detecting and refuting, came to him, thinking to ensnare him by captious questions, and asked him by what authority he set up to be a preacher of a new doctrine, a reformer. But Jesus knowing how with a merely malicious intention these men asked this question, did not think fit to give them a direct answer, but chose rather to puzzle and silence them, by retorting upon them another question. Let me, said he, ask you one thing first, that must prepare the way for answering your question: The Baptism

* John iii. 20. † Matt. xxi. 23. Luke xx. 1.

tism of John was it from heaven or from men?" This question surprized and confounded them. For they reasoned thus with themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven, he will tell us, why then believed ye him not? But if we say of men, all the people will stone us, for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. They therefore answered, that they could not tell whence it was. Upon which Jesus in like manner said to them, Neither do I, said he, tell you what authority I have to do what I do. Here certainly is an instance of that kind of defensive raillery which *is the fittest resource when the spirit of curiosity would force a discovery of more truth than can conveniently be told. As it is in some cases real humanity and kindness to bide strong truths from tender eyes; and for this reason, we find Jesus Christ suiting his discoveries to the understandings of his disciples*, letting in light upon them in proportion to what they could bear, and hiding other things from them which were yet too hard for them; so in other cases it is true prudence to wave giving a direct answer: But to do this by a pleasant amusement, is certainly easier and civilier, than by a harsh denial or remarkable reserve. To go about industriously to confound men in a mysterious manner, and to take advantage, or draw pleasure from that perplexity they are thrown into by such uncertain talk, is as unhandsome, in a way of raillery, as when done with the greatest seriousness, or in the most solemn way of deceit. 'Tis certainly a mean impotent dull sort of wit, which amuses all alike, and leaves the most sensible man, and even a friend, equally in doubt, and at a loss to understand what one's real mind is upon any subject. This is that gross sort of raillery which is so offensive in good company. And indeed there is as much difference between one sort and another, as between fair-dealing and hypocrisy. But it is often necessary, it is*

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* Mark iv. 33.

often fit, to speak in parables and with a double meaning, that the enemy *may be amused, and they only who have ears to hear may hear*. Accordingly our Saviour willingly explained his allegories to those who shewed a sincere disposition to learn truth and virtue, when they found any difficulty to understand them. But the malicious and evil-intentioned, he left to their own dulness of understanding, or rather hardness of heart. This is the reason he gives for his speaking so often in parables *. And upon the occasion just mentioned, having confounded the priests and scribes by his unexpected repartee, he proceeds to tell this tale or parable, which exceedingly moved the well-affected, but cut the priests and scribes to the quick. For they perceived that it was directed against them. A certain man, said Jesus, planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the time of vintage he sent a servant to the farmers to receive of them a proportion of the fruit of the vineyard; but they, instead of rendering him his just dues, abused and beat his servant, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant; but they maltreated him, and sent him likewise away empty. He sent a third, and they were more outrageous. They wounded him, and cast him out in the most violent manner. At last, the owner of the vineyard seeing his servants had not authority enough to bring the husbandmen to their duty, resolved to send his own beloved son to them, thinking that surely they would reverence him. But when the husbandman saw him, they reasoned among themselves saying, This is the heir, come, let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now, said Jesus, after this enormous cruelty and wickedness, what punishment do you think the master of the vineyard, when he returns,

* Matt. xiii. 9.

turns, will inflict upon those ungrateful and rebellious husbandmen? Some answered, He will certainly destroy those wicked men, and give the vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season: And they said, God forbid this should be our case. But the priests and scribes seeing their own opposition to the instructions of God painted out by this allegory in a very touching manner, they were provoked, and would have laid violent hands upon him, had they not feared the people. But not daring to do this, they pursued their resolution of endeavouring to ensnare him by cunning questions, that they might take hold of his words, and have something to accuse him of to the Roman governor. In pursuance of this design, they suborned spies to follow him, and under a pretence of desiring his opinion in a case of conscience, some of these put to him such a question, on a certain occasion, as they thought he could not possibly answer, without offending either the common people of the Jews on the one side, or the *Roman* governor on the other. The question they put to him was this, "Whether the Jews, who were the peculiar people of God, and under his immediate government, ought in conscience to pay tribute to the Roman Emperor, and so acknowledge the authority of the Romans over them or not?" And in hopes to entice him to give such an answer as they might interpret to a seditious sense, they prefaced their question with a profession of their great opinion of his extraordinary integrity, courage and sincerity, and that therefore they knew he would not fear to tell them his judgment plainly. But Jesus, aware of their crafty malignant intention, said to them, Why do you think to draw me into a snare? I well know your hypocritical malice. And calling for a piece of money wherewith the tribute used to be paid, he asked them whose stamp was upon it? They answered Cæsar's; which, when they

they acknowledged to be the Roman Emperor's, he said, Render then to the Roman Emperor what ye confess to be his due; and always submit yourselves so far to the government ye are under, as is consistent with what ye owe to God, or with his laws. Not being able to make any bad handle of this judicious answer, they marvelled at his superior prudence, and left him.

But after these were gone, some of the Sadducees, who believed that men perish utterly at death, and there is no future life, came and put this question to him. "Moses in the law directs, That if a man dies and leaves his wife without children, his brother shall marry his widow, to raise up children for the continuance of the name and family of the deceased. Now there happened in a certain family to be seven brothers, whereof the eldest having married a wife, after some time died, and left no children. The second married the widow, and he also died without children. The same happened to the third, to the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh brother. Therefore, in the other life, or after the resurrection, whose wife must that woman be, for all the seven brothers had an equal right to her?" This it seems the Sadducees, who had a great regard for the law of Moses, thought an unanswerable objection against a future state. Now, on this occasion, a principal article in religion being concerned in the question, our Saviour talks plainly and roundly with them, and offers an argument for a future state to them *, which they could not, upon their own principles refuse. He tells them that in a future state, there is neither marrying nor giving in mar-

* The word *ἀνάστασις* properly signifies a future life in general. See Dr. Samuel Clarke's paraphrase on this passage. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, not because they thought it impossible, but because they thought there was no future state at all, but that the soul perished at death.

marriage; because there will be no mortality or succession; but that those who are worthy of happiness in the other world, are equal unto the angels. And he adds, now that this is no fiction, but that there shall be another life after this; if ye had studied the scriptures ye profess to believe, ye might and ought to have collected from God's styling himself to Moses in the bush, The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, long after the death of those patriarchs. God surely is not the God of those who do not exist, but of the living. These patriarchs therefore being dead, yet live to God.

Hereupon some of the Scribes, or expounders of the law, who were present and heard this dispute, being pleased at the readiness and clearness of Jesus's answer, by which he effectually confuted and silenced the Sadducees, they could not forbear testifying their admiration and approbation, saying, "Master thou hast well said." In like manner did he frequently silence those who came to entangle him by other ensnaring questions, and put them to shame publickly. And upon all such occasions, he was sure to lay open and lash severely the hypocritical superstitious zeal of the Pharisees. "Beware, says he, of the Scribes, who affect an air of gravity and austerity, in order to be accounted wise and virtuous by the people, but under a mask of religion, conceal the oppressive injustice and covetousness of which their hearts are full. They love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and for a shew of godliness make long prayers. But look into their moral conduct; and are they not miserable oppressors of the widows and orphans, and all those who are not able to detect their frauds or oppose their violence? Surely they shall be doubly punished by the just judgment of God, both for their wickedness, and for the false varnish of religion under which they cover it."

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But none of them durst retort any such charge against him, as willing as they were to destroy his credit and authority. When the multitude, stirred up by the priests and Pharisees, cried out, Crucify him, the governor said, What evil hath he done? And when Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see you to it. To mention but one other instance at present, of the prudence with which he defended himself against his wicked and malignant persecutors, without confounding or obscuring the truth to those who were of a temper fit for receiving information (for more will occur when we come to consider his doctrine) let us cast our eyes upon the subsequent part of that story we have already narrated. When the Jews took up stones to throw at him *, having pleasantly asked them, for which of his good works it was they so maltreated him? The Jews answered, "For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, because thou, being a man, makest thyself equal to God." To this Jesus replies, Does not your own scripture call men gods, and children of the Most High, only because being judges and magistrates, they acted by commission and authority from God. If then the scripture itself, which ye cannot contradict or find fault with, scruples not to call ordinary magistrates *Gods*, how unreasonable is it in you to accuse me of blasphemy for calling myself the Son of God, unless you can shew that I am not sent by him into the world, upon a much more extraordinary occasion, with other authority and with other powers, and with other testimonies of my divine commission, than was ever given to any temporal ruler or judge? If I do not give evidence of my being sent of God, and sanctified by him, believe

* John x. 35.

believe me not. But if you cannot make any solid objection against my sanctity, my doctrine, or the evidences I give of my divine commission, why call you me a blasphemer, if the scripture blasphemes not, when it calls ordinary rulers Gods, and children of God ?

We have thus agreed upon the rule or test by which pretenders to prophecy and divine mission are to be tried in the first place ; or rather Christ himself hath fixed and determined it for us. Let us then try him by his own rule. I think in treating of other things, his zeal for true religion and virtue, in opposition to superstition, hath sufficiently appeared, and other instances of it will occur afterwards : But it is so essential a point, even when we are considering Christ as a mere philosopher, as a Socrates, for instance, that I cannot choose but add one or two more examples of his teaching on this subject.

Jesus happened to walk through some corn-fields on the sabbath-day with his disciples *. And as they were going, the disciples being hungry, and knowing what they were permitted by the law in such a case to do §, plucked the ears of corn, and rubbing out the corn with their hands, began to eat. But the Jews, who watched all occasions of reproaching them, observing that it was the sabbath-day when they did this, said to Jesus, See you not how your disciples break the sabbath ? Why do you not reprove them ? Jesus answered, Consider what you say ; you are reflecting upon examples ye pretend to hold in great veneration, from which you may and ought to learn, that God never intended by any positive constitution, such as the strict judaical observation of the sabbath, to put such difficulties upon men, as to hinder them from doing things abso-

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* Deut. xxiii. 2. *When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbours, then mayest thou pluck the ears with thine hand.*

§ Matt. xii.

lutely necessary. Have ye not read how David behaved himself in such a case? Do ye not remember, how when he was hungry on a journey, the priest gave him consecrated bread out of the tabernacle, which in strictness none but the priests were allowed to eat, and both David and they that were with him, eat of it? Now, if David be not blameable for this, how can ye, consistently with yourselves, reproach my disciples for doing so small a thing as plucking and eating ears of corn on the sabbath-day? Again, do you not remember how the priests are by the law appointed to do several sorts of works in the temple upon the sabbath-day, and yet they are no where accused, but are reckoned blameless. You will perhaps say this was a case excepted, because on that occasion the priests were employed in the temple, and about the service of God, by God's own express command. Very true. And I might tell you, after the proofs I have given of my extraordinary mission from God, to declare to the world the true and acceptable religion, that in this place is one who is greater than the temple, or whose business and employment hath a nearer relation to God than the external decorum of the temple. But I shall only tell you, that if ye understood the frequent declarations God has made to you by his prophets, or had just ideas of God himself, ye would not make this objection. For what hath God more clearly manifested by his prophets to you, or what doth reason itself more plainly teach, than that God will have mercy and not sacrifice, or that God prefers works of righteousness and charity before sacrifices, and the most punctual performance of all positive laws and outward ceremonies. Ye cannot find fault with my disciples, unless you deny this truth, and affirm that the sabbath was made to be a hindrance to man in the performance of moral duties,

duties, and cannot, even in case of necessity, be dispensed with by any man.

On another sabbath-day, Jesus entered into the synagogue*, and there offered an occasion of inculcating and confirming the same doctrine. For there happened to be in the synagogue a man having a withered hand. And the Jews still lying at the catch for something they might accuse Jesus of, observed him, and asked whether he would think it lawful to heal the man on the sabbath-day? Jesus said to them, Who is there among you so foolish, as under pretence of strict regard to the sabbath-day, would not, if a beast should by any accident be in danger of its life, or of any great mischief, immediately relieve it even on the sabbath-day. But how much better is a man than a beast? Wherefore, it is lawful to do well to mankind on the sabbath-day. Upon this occasion he inculcates upon them this eternal truth, "That the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath, *i. e.* that all positive or ritual ordinances are, in the nature of things, submitted and subordinated to the great purpose of religion and virtue, the real good of man, for whose use they are appointed.

Another instance of this class is to this effect: The Pharisees and Scribes, who held it strictly as a law delivered down to them by tradition §, from their predecessors or Rabbi's, that in many cases they ought not to eat without washing their hands immediately before, when they saw some of Jesus's disciples eat bread with unwashen hands, they found fault, and asked him, "Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?" To this he answers, Well hath Esaias described your character when he says, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in

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* Ibid. and Luke vi. § Mark vii.

vain do they worship me, teaching for true religion certain usages founded merely on the commandment of men. Neglecting the great commands of God, justice, charity and truth, ye lay the stress of your religion upon such frivolous things, introduced by superstitious customs and traditions, as washing of hands, and pots and cups, and the like. Nay, and ye not only prefer these fooleries before the commandments of God, founded upon and discoverable from the immutable differences of things, to the neglect and omission of your duty; but ye even directly transgress and act plainly in contradiction to those commandments, when some tradition happens to be contrary to them. For instance, it is an expresse command of God *, that every man should honour his father and mother. This commandment is of natural obligation, and of such importance and necessity is this duty, by the law of Moses, that whoever transgresses it, is positively condemned to die by that law. Yet ye on the contrary teach, that if a man gives that money to be employed in the service of the temple, with which he ought to have relieved the necessities of his parents, that then he sins not, though he suffers his parents to want. And thus ye hinder men from relieving the wants of their parents, which yet is evidently an especial part of that honour which men are expressly required to pay to them by the law of God. By this, continueth he, and many such unjust devices and traditions, you make the laws of God of no effect; ye distinguish and subtilize away all moral obligations into mere ceremony, into an empty form of godliness. Upon this occasion, turning himself from the Scribes and Pharisees, he called to the common people to draw nigh, and to attend to a most important truth, that understand it, they might treasure it up in their minds, as a pre-

* Exod. xx. 12. Exod. xxi. 17.

preservative against all the artful abuses of superstition and hypocritical zeal. Cleanness and uncleanness in the sight of God, consist not in outward things, such as meats and drinks, but in inward things, *i. e.* the inward dispositions and affections of the mind. A man is not rendered impure by outward accidents; but then is a man defiled, when the impure motions of his heart produce or excite to immoral and wicked actions. Whosoever is capable and desirous of instruction, let him remember and often reflect upon this verity.

This is a very obvious truth. One would imagine that none could consider it without perceiving its evidence, its reasonableness. But here we have a strong instance of the power of prejudice and wrong education, and how superstition blinds reason, and renders it incapable of understanding the plainest moral truths. His disciples themselves did not fully comprehend the meaning of this lesson. However, being desirous of instruction, when he was alone, they asked him to explain to them yet more fully the notion of cleanness and uncleanness, which he did in this manner: That which enters not into the heart but into the belly, cannot defile a man's mind, which is the seat of virtue and vice. Nothing can be called unclean, or be said to defile a man but what comes from man himself, that is, proceeds from the thoughts and designs of his heart, of which he is master. All other things are, with respect to him, external and out of his power. From within, or out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, and all evil actions, such as fornication, adultery, murder, theft, covetousness, fraud and oppression, cheating, lasciviousness, envy, pride, calumny, and in one word, all tumultuous and irregular appetites and passions. And these are the things, which proceeding from corrupt minds, make men really unclean and hateful to God. But
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if your minds be pure, and free from these pollutions, there is no uncleanness in neglecting the superstitious washings of the Pharisees, who wash their bodies but not their hearts, who affect an external shew of purity, but are inwardly rottenness and corruption, like whited or adorned sepulchres *.

Thus did Jesus teach. And tho' you know, my friend, how highly I esteem the moral doctrine of Socrates, yet I do not scruple to assert, that no where do we find him opposing superstition with such ardour and force of argument as Christ was ever and anon doing. Nor is there any where, certainly, so plain an account to be found of the nature of true worship, than (to mention no other of Christ's discourses or conferences) in his short conversation with the Samaritan woman *. This woman being convinced by a previous conversation with him, that he was a person of very extraordinary knowledge, and might be a prophet, asked his opinion about the great dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans. We, said she, the Samaritans, contend that mount Gerazim here, where our temple is built, is the place where God ought to be worshipped with sacrifices and offerings; Abraham and Jacob having built altars here, and so this being a more ancient place for sacrifice than even Jerusalem itself. The Jews, on the contrary, contend, that Jerusalem is the only place in which God has chosen to have sacrifices offered to him: And they abhor and detest our worship as erroneous and superstitious, because it is performed in a place and manner somewhat different from theirs. Now I desire you would inform me, whether our place of worship be not as holy as theirs, and our worship as true and acceptable to God. Jesus answered her: There is the less reason to trouble yourselves now about this dispute, inasmuch as the time is at hand, when the sacrifices
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* St. Luke xi. 39. Matt. xxiii. 27, &c. § St. John iv. 20.

which are offered either in Jerusalem or Gerazim shall cease for ever ; and the temples themselves shall be destroyed, and so the privilege about which ye contend will be taken from you both. One thing, however, I must tell you, That as for you Samaritans, when your ancestors came first into this land, they neither knew the manner of God's worship, nor him to be the true God, but took him for some petty God of this particular country. And you owe your better instruction to the Jews, who have all along had abundant means of knowing both whom they ought to worship, and how to do it. God hath honoured Jerusalem by raising his prophets from amongst them, and never among you Samaritans ; so that you have had no other means of knowing his particular revelations but by them. And which is more, according to the promises made to the fathers, of their lineage the Saviour of the world was to come, by whom God intended to give a more compleat and universal revelation of his will than ever was yet made. Light and salvation are therefore of the Jews : But what you are most concerned to observe and understand is this, That hereafter neither shall the worship of God be confined to one place, nor shall it stand in sacrifices and burnt-offerings : But they only shall be accounted the true worshippers, who, in what place soever they are, give their hearts and souls entirely to God, to love and obey him in all things. For that is the worship which always was most acceptable to God ; and that doctrine is already begun to be preached, by which the great reformation is to be made. You may think this a new doctrine ; but consider that it must be true, for God is a spirit, and they who would approve themselves, and offer acceptable worship to him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. You cannot reflect upon the spiritual nature and moral per-

perfections of God without perceiving this truth. For how can we please such a Being, but by adoring with pure hearts and understanding minds, his moral excellencies, and by endeavouring to imitate them in our lives.

This is indeed a truth discoverable, demonstrable by reason, from the nature of things. Nor does its being said by Socrates or Jesus, render it less or more such a truth. But tho' it be such, yet it was far from being universally known when Socrates preached against superstition, and endeavoured to bring men to the knowledge of the truth. And when Christ appeared in the world, the sense of this truth seemed to be almost universally effaced, even among the Jews. And therefore, if the Greeks were obliged to Socrates for his moral instructions, the Jews and Romans were at least equally indebted to the instructions of Jesus. Without diminishing the former, justice may be done to the latter. And whoever impartially considers the doctrines of these two instructors, will find himself obliged to own, that it was Jesus who was most full and particular in refuting superstition, and shewing wherein true religion consists.

To give but one example in this comparative way : The discourse of Socrates with Alcibiades about prayer, is full of excellent instruction. There he shews, how ignorantly of true good or happiness, men go to petition or pray to the Gods, and puzzles Alcibiades rather than instructs him. But Jesus in his discourses on the subject, clearly points out the true happiness of man, the unity of God, and the universality of providence, and the difference between the things that are within man's power, and by consequence, the only proper objects of his solicitude, and those which are independent of him, or without his power, and therefore the objects neither of his care nor industry, but of his resignation
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to the divine will. Let us run over one passage to this purpose.

When one applied to Jesus in this manner *, Sir, I believe you to be an extraordinary prophet, I beseech you therefore, make use of your authority to oblige my brother, who unjustly detains from me my share of an estate, to do me right. Jesus answered, Who gave me a right to judge and divide in matters of property ? I have no such right. My business is of another kind, even to instruct in the great truths of religion and morality. It would be a very just ground of exception against me, if I should take upon me to determine in affairs belonging to the civil judges. Having thus refused to intermeddle in this affair, he took occasion to warn his disciples and all the people, of the evil of covetousness. “ The two pursuits, says he, which divide mankind, are external and internal goods ; virtue and riches. And as no man can have two masters, so none can make virtue his chief happiness, and at the same time have his heart wholly set upon external goods. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Beware therefore of covetousness ; and consider that the true comfort of life, or genuine and sincere, unchanging happiness, consisteth not in having many and great possessions. They are most miserably deluded, who are extremely solicitous about outward things as their chief good, and promise themselves all happiness in the enjoyment of them. The happiness of a rational being cannot lie in perishing things, but must consist in goods which are as immortal as our souls.” This lesson he enforces by a parable. There was, says he, a certain rich man whose ground brought forth a very plentiful crop, so that all his barns were not sufficient to contain it. Upon this the rich man, considering with himself how he should dispose of all his wealth, came at last to this

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* Luke xii.

resolution, that he would pull down his old granaries, and build new ones larger than the former, and that in them he would treasure up this great plenty, sufficient for many years. And then he thought, that having laid up so many goods in store for a long time to come, he might safely indulge his ease, fare deliciously every day, live splendidly and luxuriously, and not fear that any thing could deprive him of this happiness, or that so great provision could ever come to an end. He said to his soul, Take thy pleasure, eat, drink and be merry, for this is true happiness, and now have I sufficient means for every enjoyment. But what was the event, said Jesus? Observe how unthinkingly, how fatally he deceived himself. For at the very instant he was applauding himself in his own mind, promising himself much pleasure, and calling himself a very happy man, God called him suddenly into another world, whither his treasures could not follow him. This is the case of him who layeth up treasures for himself on earth, and makes no provision for his future happiness, by enriching his mind with those virtues that are treasures which endure for ever. Let therefore your chief solicitude be to increase in spiritual riches; to grow in wisdom and virtue, and the goods of the mind, which are everlasting as is the soul. Be not at all solicitous about things absolutely without your power, but learn to resign the conduct and management of these to the infinitely good providence, which governeth all things. Learn to know the difference between what your solicitude and industry can, and what it cannot do. Now, which of you, by all his anxiety, can add any thing, for instance, to his stature. But if it be vain and unreasonable to be anxious about this, it must be equally so to be anxious about other things, as much or rather more without your power. Nay, be not too careful and solicitous even about the outward things,

things, which in some measure depend upon your industry. And for this end do ye frequently call to mind, and seriously reflect upon the all-ruling providence of God. Consider the other creatures of God, the birds, beasts and plants, things far inferior to rational beings, and of much less value in the sight of God. Consider how God, without their being able to provide for themselves before hand, or so much as to foresee their own wants, preserves and nourishes even these meaner creatures, and wonderfully furnishes things necessary for their subsistence in their several seasons. Consider this extensive care of heaven, and reflect how much more an all-wise providence will provide for you, whom he hath created with so much greater excellencies, and therefore to nobler ends. Exert your industry, without which you cannot acquire any external goods, but with resignation to God ; and be not over anxious, distrustful or fearful, but make it the principal business of your lives to grow in virtue ; for that, and that alone is stable happiness. Seek the kingdom of God, seek the knowledge of God's will, and those excellent dispositions of mind, which make men good subjects to God, and which alone can qualify for dwelling in his kingdom, the future kingdom of the blessed, into which nothing impure can enter. And be persuaded, that God will take proper care of those who make virtue their chief study. He best knoweth of what you have need, or what is best for you."

This is the account our Saviour gives of human duty and happiness ; and accordingly the excellent directory he gave his disciples for prayer, consists not of *informations* or *counsels* to God, but of adoration, resignation, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and generous benevolent wishes for the increase of virtue, or the spreading of his kingdom in the world, and acts of forgiveness to those who offend us, under a

serious impression of the need we stand in of pardon from God, and of the acceptableness to him of a charitable, meek, forgiving and beneficent temper. And surely no exercise can be more proper for perfecting us in any art or habit, than this moral exercise is for purifying our minds, subduing our irregular appetites and passions, strengthening our virtuous affections, and comforting and establishing us in the practice of true goodness, in love to God and love to mankind, which Jesus often tells us is the whole of human duty, and the way to eternal happiness, as well as in itself the most agreeable temper of mind, and by being such a present reward to itself. *Thus to ask, thus to wish more virtue is to gain.*

But after having shewn what an enemy Christ was to superstition, it is by no means improper to observe, that he well knew the necessity of a public religion, in order to preserve regard to God and to virtue in the world, the great props of society, and of all that is great or good in human life ; and that for this reason, there must be some ritual or positive ordinances of his appointment, and to consider whence he adapted them, and for what use. Mean time, let it just be suggested, that he came to be baptized of John, who knowing him to be the Messiah, refused to baptize him, saying, It is much more fit that you should baptize me than I you. And for what reason did our Saviour do this ? It was because, as he tells John, he thought it thus became him to give an example of doing all things decently and with order. “ Thus it becometh us, says he, to fulfil all righteousness.” This respect we owe to outward rites and ordinances, even tho’ they be not immediately of God’s appointment, (as baptism was not) if they have a good meaning and intention, and however they may be abused, have in themselves an aptitude or propriety to signify the great end of worship and religion, purity of life
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and manners. He for the same reasons eat the passover with his disciples ; and exercised his power and authority in cleansing the temple of those who profaned it by rendering it a place of covetousness, extortion and cheating, saying *, This place was designed not for a place of merchandize, but for the service of God, according as Esaias prophesied, " That the temple of God should be an house of prayer for all people." The place he cleared, was the outward court, the court of the Gentiles, where the devout proselites of the Gentiles, who were not admitted into the inner and holier part of the temple, might worship the true God. This he found like a common market, filled with money-changers stalls, and sellers of cattle and doves, and the like, who sat there under pretence of having these things near at hand, for the convenience of those who came up to sacrifice. And from whatever motives this abuse was suffered or connived at by the priests, it was certainly fit for him to exerce his authority in rectifying it, who came to teach, that with God there is no respect of persons, but that whosoever feareth God and worketh righteousness, of whatever nation he be, is accepted of God. Nor did he, by so doing, commit any riot contrary to law, but he acted agreeably to the law, and the original intention of the place which he thus cleansed. It was therefore an example of his respect to the public order and establishment, as well as an emphatical declaration against the encroachments those who ought to have taken care of the public laws had made, or suffered to be made, on the rights of the Gentile proselites. And to add no more at present upon this head, when he had cured any person, his orders to them were, Go thy way and shew thyself first to the priest, who is to judge of your being clean, and offer the sacrifice which the law requires for your purification, that
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* Matt. xxi.

ye may convince them of the reality of the cure, and yet not give them any occasion of calumny.

He had therefore good reason to say, when he laid open the corruptions that had crept into the Jewish church, by false expositions of the law of Moses, Think not because I thus correct the errors and false doctrines of your rabbi's and priests, that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. "I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." I am not come to oppose your established religion, but to restore you to just notions of its spiritual and moral intent, and to shew you that it hath been corrupted and abused, and that now its typical signification is fully accomplished. For verily your ceremonial law shall not cease till its spiritual end is fulfilled. Indeed, setting aside all the reasons we have to think the Jewish ceremonial law was of divine appointment, hardly can so good an account be given why a Socrates paid such regard to the superstitious usages in his time, while he was declaiming so openly against false notions of religion, as why Jesus Christ opposed nothing but the misrepresentations and corruptions of the law of Moses, and submitted in every instance, with great decency and reverence to the authorised rites and usages of the Jews, took care to caution against confounding them with the *weightier matters of the law*, and placing the whole of religion in them, or imagining the most pious and virtuous could not be acceptable to God, if they were strangers to such positive ordinances. He no-where refuses the fitness * of some exterior observances, without which there can be no such thing as a public acknowledgment of God, well-knowing how necessary a general sense of religion is to public peace and good order, and that public religion cannot be upheld without some positive institutions or symbols : For publick worship must be performed in

* Luke ii. 42, &c. Matt. xxiii. 23.

in an authorized regular place and manner. But he well understood, on the other hand, how liable all such are to be perverted by corrupt and crafty men. And therefore this was, so to speak, the *chief burden* of all his discourses, even to warn men against being deceived into regarding positive rites as of the same importance with moral obligations, or in any other view but as shadows of the absolute necessity of sanctity of heart and life, in order to please God, and attain to his favour. The Essenes among the Jews, like some modern mystics, thought public worship of little consequence, and laid a mighty stress upon closet contemplation and devotion. The Pharisees, on the other hand, placed the whole of religion in punctual regard to external ceremonies, and imagined they could thereby atone for irregularities in practice, nay for unrighteousness, and thus substituted certain outward formalities in the room of real virtue. And this hath been the most numerous sect in all times, partly because religion is natural to mankind, and those who acknowledge a God, must have some plausible way of appeasing their consciences if they live in sin, and partly because superstition may be made a profitable trade at the expence of virtue, against which corrupt traffic, just notions of moral obligations are the only security. The Sadducees denied a future state, and taught that the soul is not distinct from the body, and therefore must perish with it, but yet were in their practice less dissolute, and far more benevolent than the proud Pharisees, who preached and boasted of a godliness superior to good works. Jesus Christ taught a future state of rewards and punishments in opposition to the Sadducees : The absolute necessity of virtue, and the subordination of ritual performances to morals, in contradiction to the doctrine of the Pharisees, whom he every-where represents as the most dangerous enemies to virtue,
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there being indeed no other so effectual way of supplanting it, as by putting something very specious and solemn in its room : And in opposition to the Essenes, he set forth the spirit of ritual and positive institutions, and paid due deference to them in their spirit, or as they may be means of maintaining upon men's minds that pious veneration of God, without which, that virtue, which is the cement and ornament of present society, as well as a necessary qualification for happiness in the future life, where all the enjoyments are rational, cannot be perfect. Religion, in a word, is the firmest bond of civil society : But public worship is requisite to keep up a sense of religion : And public worship can no more take place without some external forms, than there can be language or discourse without words. Now Jesus Christ hath left us the simplest form of public worship, and the least capable of being perverted into superstition that can be imagined ; tho', while there is such a thing as ambition or avarice in the world, *i. e.* while men are men, nothing is absolutely secure against corruption and wicked abuse. There is nothing that can be called wholly positive in the religion he taught, besides baptism and the supper ; the intention of which rites shall be considered afterwards. And hardly can any portion of his instructions be read, which does not warn us in the strongest terms to beware of substituting any outward worship in the room of sincere virtue ; for nothing can render us acceptable to God, who is perfect reason and virtue, but a well regulated mind and life ; or qualify for future felicity but virtuous dispositions and habits, an improved understanding, a sanctified heart, and a truly generous and benevolent soul. This is the end of all his parables : To this scope are all his reasonings and exhortations solely directed. So that while nothing is added to the religious worship Christianity prescribes, except
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some few necessary decencies and formalities, which it must be left to society to regulate, if reading the institutions of our Saviour make any part of divine service, there is all the security that there can be in the nature of things, against the abuses or misrepresentations of the Christian rituals, to which religious ceremonies the best chosen cannot but be liable.

What virtue doth he not recommend? And what else does he pronounce blessed, but piety towards God and benevolence towards mankind? Charity is the fulfilment of his law, or more properly speaking, the fulfilment of what he calls the will of God. According to his doctrine, virtue alone is happiness here or hereafter; or in whatever state rational and social beings are placed, they can only be happier as they are more *benevolent and kinder*. God is supremely happy, because he is supremely good. What is the purport of his discourse on the mount, but that *height of bliss is but height of charity*, and that virtue's very tears yield more true satisfaction than the broadest mirth of fools.

Blessed, said he, are the modest, humble and contented, who prefer honesty and virtue to all the pomp and pageantry of this world, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the pious and virtuous, even when they are distressed and mourn, for virtuous consciousness, and the hope of future bliss, are the truest, the most solid comfort. These afford joys far surpassing all sensual revellings. Blessed are they who are not tormented by insatiable appetites after wordly riches or honours, which are as unsatisfactory as they are uncertain, but whose hunger and thirst are after greater perfection in knowledge and virtue, and who can derive virtuous strength and consolation to their minds, from the belief of an infinitely wise providence, and a glorious immortality after death, in which the pure in

heart shall attain to knowledge of God's works and government; which in comparison of the highest and clearest knowledge we can now attain, may be called *seeing God*. Let therefore the love of God and the love of mankind reign in your hearts. Give full scope to benevolence to expand itself, let it extend even to your enemies; for to do good, to be generous even to the unthankful, and overcome evil by good, is godlike beneficence. By such boundless love and charity alone, can we become like God, and merit to be called his children, who *makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust*. Few men are so bad as not to love those that love them. And it is indeed but a very small degree of goodness to boast of, if we only pay ordinary civilities to those who deal kindly with us. This is no more than what the worst of men think themselves bound to do in common gratitude. Let therefore your charity and well-doing rise far above this common pitch. Let it extend itself universally, in imitation of the divine goodness, which is the greatest excellency and perfection of God. Be ye all love, for God is love. His exhortations every where run in the same strain. Who, according to his doctrine, are approved and rewarded at the day of judgment, or in a future state, but those who fed the hungry and clothed the naked, those who abounded in charity and good works? And who are accused or condemned to punishment, but the selfish and hard-hearted, those who are utterly devoid of humanity and compassion, and who living in riot and luxury, are strangers to the divine pleasure, of relieving the distressed and doing good? Let me just take notice of two of his parables relating to charity and beneficence.

Jesus sitting in the court of the temple *, over against the treasury, looked upon the people, as they

* Mark xii. 41.

they gave in their free-will offerings into the chest for pious and charitable uses. And among the rest there came a poor widow woman, and put in two small pieces of money, making the value of a farthing. Now, when Jesus observed this, he called his disciples to him, and gave them this excellent lesson. Assuredly, said he, this poor woman has done a greater act of piety and charity than any of the rich men whom you saw cast in a great deal of money. For they gave only a small proportion out of their great estates, but she, in the zeal of her heart, has put in her whole stock. And God judges of men's actions, not by the measure of the outward work, but by the inward affection and temper of the mind. The outward means are not in our power, but the good disposition itself is.

Again, a certain lawyer, one versed in determining questions, and deciding difficulties in the law *, came to make trial of Christ's knowledge and judgment, and to observe whether he would teach any thing contrary to the law. The question he proposed to Jesus was, What do you say is *the main and principal thing*, by which a man must attain that eternal life which you discourse so much about. Jesus said, What doth the law you are so well skilled in determine in the case? What does it say about religion and duty? The scribe answered, That which the law commands is this, That we should love God sincerely and constantly, and that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. Jesus replied, You have answered well. This rule do you observe, and you shall inherit eternal life. The Scribe could not choose but approve Jesus's answer, but yet desiring to justify himself, and hoping to appear a very good man, for being kind to those that dwelt near him, of the same nation, and religion or sect, he asked Jesus farther, saying, When

* Luke x. 25.

the law commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves, whom does it mean by *our neighbour*, and how far must we extend that word. To this Jesus answered by a parable. " There was, said he, a traveller going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and in the way he was attacked by robbers, who stripped him, and not content with that, sorely wounded him, so that they left him upon the road almost dead. Now it happened that a certain priest passed by that way, who one would expect by his very place and office, professing great holiness, should have assisted the poor wounded traveller. But when he saw him, he turned off to the other side, and went on his way. A little after a levite came likewise to the same place, of whom, if not for the sake of his religion, yet at least on account of his tribe and profession, it might have been expected, that he should have had compassion on his brother, and have relieved him in his extreme distress : But this man also only looked on him, and passed by without doing any thing for him. At last a certain Samaritan passing that way saw him, and took pity on him, and tho' a stranger to the nation, and an enemy to the religion of the Jews, yet in great charity he stopped, and went to him and dressed his wounds, and set him upon his own beast, and carried him to an inn, and saw all necessary care taken of him. And the next day, being obliged to go on in his journey, he called the master of the house, and paid him for the wounded man's lodging, and other expences, and gave him strict charge to take particular care of him till he should recover, and promised at his return to pay all the charges himself. Now said Jesus to the Scribe, which of these three men do you think was properly the poor traveller's neighbour, and did the office of a neighbour to him, the priest and Levite that passed by and neglected him, or the Samaritan, who tho' a stranger

stranger both by birth and religion; yet with great charity assisted and relieved him? The Scribe said, He that charitably assisted him was no doubt his best neighbour. Then replied Jesus, Do you likewise follow this rule. If the Samaritan acted herein the part of a good man, do you go and imitate his example. Look not upon those only to be your neighbours who dwell near you, or are of the same nation, religion, or sect; but think every one such who stands in any need of your relief and assistance, however otherwise he may be a stranger to you; and so extend your charity to all mankind.

How instructive is this excellent similitude? And how, indeed, can any one impartially attend to the parables or allegories of Christ, and not admire in him what other sages of antiquity, Socrates in particular, are so highly commended for, a *certain exquisite and refined raillery, by virtue of which he could give the most cutting reproofs, without directly reproaching, and treat the highest subjects of religion and morals, and those of the commonest capacity both together, and render them explanatory of each other.* His tales or fables were so many mirrors, in which his hearers could not but see their own features nicely delineated: Looking-glasses *, in which his hearers could not choose but see at once their own follies and vices, and the true beauty or virtue they ought to aspire after. It is indeed this mirror-quality of parables and fabulous narrations, in which their peculiar excellency and force, as instructors, above bare precepts and reasonings consists. And it is good for us, if we would learn our duty, and discover our imperfections, often to look into such mirrors.

Whatever,

* So St. James speaks of the Christian law, Epist. of St. James i. 24.

Whatever, therefore, may be found to be true with regard to any other pretension of Jesus Christ, his instructions must be acknowledged to be very sound, and to have been delivered in a most masterly way. And it is no wonder that he who thus taught true religion and virtue, and thus reprov'd superstition and vice, was heard with admiration, and own'd greatly to excel, in his manner of instructing, the Jewish doctors, who fill'd their discourses with vain subtleties, and reason'd in a dry formal manner, from the authority of rabbi's and heads of sects, or from idle traditions. The things which he spake were great and noble; and he deliver'd them with a voice of majesty and authority, of gravity and truth, and enforced them by the most apposite striking similitudes.

All this, I think, hath been made sufficiently evident. But let us compare his example with his preaching. Did his conduct answer to his excellent, his most pure and virtuous doctrine?

First of all, he was most indefatigable in teaching true religion, and in confuting errors that struck at the very vitals of morality and virtue, and perverted godliness into a vain form, without any beneficial power or efficacy, nay, into a commutation for that which only can be of any use, and consequently have any excellence, a benevolent and pious temper of mind, and conformable practice. He not only avoided no occasion of doing this, but he sought opportunities of giving these wholesome instructions. And in consequence of this vigilance to teach truth and righteousness, he was maliciously upbraided with liking the company of publicans and sinners, and suffering his disciples also to associate with them.

When Jesus call'd Matthew to follow him *, he invited Jesus home with him to his house. And when

* Matt. ix. 10.

when they sat down to table, many tax-gatherers, who were men hateful to the Jews, and many profligate persons of their acquaintance, sat down next Jesus and his disciples. Which, when the proud Pharisees saw, they were moved with envy, but not daring to provoke Jesus himself, who had formerly reprehended their arrogance, they asked his disciples, "Why doth your master, who pretends to be a holy and sanctified person, keep company with the worst of men? But Jesus hearing them ask the question, gave an answer to them that is full of instruction, and not obscurely pointed out the great end he proposed to himself by his preaching, and that in the figurative way we have already commended. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Further, saith he, I would have you who make this objection, to attend carefully to the full meaning of the saying of a prophet whose authority you own *, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The meaning of the answer plainly amounts to this. As those that are in health need not the assistance of the physician, but those that are sick, so those that are truly righteous need not my exhortations to repentance, but those that are sinners. Since therefore you account yourselves just persons, who do not need any instructions, why are ye angry with me for keeping company with such as do? And if ye account it an unfit thing, or a kind of pollution for a man to keep company with sinners, whom he may advantage by his advice, instruction and example, what think you can be the meaning of that saying of the prophet Hosea, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice?" For my part, I think to take proper methods of reforming the wicked, and bringing them to a sense of their evil ways and of their duty, is
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* Hosea vi. 6.

the greatest act of charity we can do. And the great design of my coming into the world, and of my preaching, was not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. For to the former I have nothing to say, but to exhort and encourage them to go on in the virtuous course they are already in." He preached the acceptability of true repentance, or sincere reformation to God. And nothing can indeed be more moving than the parables he employed to this purpose. I shall only mention one of them, which he spoke on the occasion that hath been taken notice of. Jesus continuing to teach and instruct the multitude *, many men of bad lives and very evil reputation, came to hear his doctrine. Whereupon the Scribes and Pharisees, men of no real virtue, but puffed up with pride and vanity, valuing themselves upon an affectation of extraordinary austerity, and despising persons of a lower character, so far as to disdain to converse with them, quarrelled with Jesus, and accused him, as if he could not possibly be a good man himself, that allowed access to such bad men to converse freely with him, and even to eat with him. But Jesus, to convince them of their folly and uncharitableness, shewed them, that conversing with sinners in order to reform them, was so far from being a thing inconsistent for a good man to do, that on the contrary it was really one of the most charitable actions, and the most pleasing to God that could be done, because God truly desires the conviction of sinners, and that they may be brought by repentance into the way to happiness. And this he illustrated and confirmed to them by the following beautiful comparison. " If a man, said he, has a flock of a hundred sheep, and one of them chance to go astray, and be in danger to be lost, is it not natural for him to leave the rest of his flock, and run

* Luke xv.

run after the straying sheep, and search all the country for it? And if he be so happy as to find it, does he not bring it back with great gladness, and rejoice on this occasion with his friends and neighbours, and testify even a greater and more sensible pleasure at the unexpected recovery of that one which was like to have been lost, than at the safety of the other ninety and nine, which never went astray? Even thus, continued Jesus, when a great sinner who was running headlong in the way to destruction, is happily reclaimed, and beyond expectation is brought back into the ways of virtue and happiness, God himself is well pleased, and all the angels in heaven rejoice, and all good men here upon earth ought to be very glad, and to do all that is in their power, with the greatest condescension and meekness, to be the instruments of so happy a change.

He added several other parables to the same purpose, all of which contain the strongest incentive to repentance. For this is plainly their meaning. While men continue in their sins they are in the way to eternal perdition, in consequence of the laws of moral rectitude, which God observes in his government of rational beings. But when they forsake their evil courses, and being convinced of the folly and unreasonableness of vice, and of the beauty of holiness, they turn to God, and begin the serious study of virtue, they are restored into the paths of life and eternal happiness: God is reconciled to them, and their recovery gives joy to the angels in heaven. "There is joy, saith Christ, in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth." And how can they who love mankind, and love virtue, not rejoice at this happy event, or not take pleasure in bringing it about? This comfortable doctrine, which without encouraging sin, is a most powerful motive to repentance,

is the glad tidings which Christ delighted to preach, and which constitute a great part of his gospel, as we shall see afterwards ; even that God, who may as a law-giver, exact strict obedience, and rigorously punish every transgression, will forgive the penitent upon their cordial reformation, and instead of perfect conformity to his will, accept of sincerity in the inward man, and habitual endeavours to improve in virtue and moral perfection. And surely to preach this doctrine to sinners, or to take all opportunities of inculcating it upon them, in order to gain them to God, *i. e.* in the scripture stile, to persuade them into the practice of virtue, which is the way to merit the favour of God, and to obtain eternal happiness, was a noble and generous employment.

But Jesus Christ did not lead a merely contemplative, or even a merely preaching life, but a very busy active one. *He was continually going about doing good.* We are not at present concerned to enquire whence he had his power, or whether it was ordinary or extraordinary. However that may be, he was continually comforting and relieving the afflicted ; and to him every hour seemed lost, in which he had not an opportunity of doing some truly useful or beneficial action.

'Tis well worth our observation on this head, that he was far from being morose or sour, inso-much that he was called a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But against this reproach he thus justifies himself* : “ Whereunto, saith he to his accusers, shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like ? They are like children playing together in the street in a froward and peevish humour. For as children at such a time do every thing just contrary to what their companions expect and desire, so the men of
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* Luke vii. 31.

this generation interpret crossly and perversely whatever we say or do ; neither can any argument persuade them to hearken to instruction, nor any manner of behaviour remove their malicious prejudices against us. John the Baptist, when he came to preach repentance to them, appeared after a retired manner in the wilderness, with fasting and abstinence, with great strictness and severity of life ; and they said he is a madman or possessed. On the contrary, Christ comes to them without any such austerity, conversing with all sorts of men freely, and eating all meats indifferently ; and they say he is a loose prophane person, a despiser of the law, and a companion of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of all her children, and from them alone can it expect a favourable reception. Men, in order to judge soundly or wisely of doctrines, must be calm and unprejudiced, lovers of truth, and lovers of virtue. And to such I fear not to appeal. Their approbation alone is worth seeking, and if my doctrine or life deserve it, I will be sure to meet with it from such.

Again some told him, *viz.* some of John's disciples *, who had been accustomed to fastings, and greater austerities than ordinary, being somewhat displeased at that freer way of living which Jesus seemed to allow his disciples, came to Jesus and said, How is it that you commend the holiness of our master John the Baptist, and profess yourself to be a teacher of extraordinary piety, yet you permit your disciples to live with greater liberty, and suffer them to omit those mortifications and austerities which both the disciples of John, and also of the Pharisees, constantly practise, fasting often, and setting apart at least some days in every week for prayer and abstinence. Jesus answered, I do not condemn you for your constancy and abstinence in fast-

* Luke v. 33.

ings; but every thing is good only in its proper season; and this is by no means a fit time to put my disciples upon such severities. For as it would be unreasonable to require the friends of a bridegroom to fast, just at the time of the wedding, and while they are with the bridegroom at the feast; so is it by no means proper to make my disciples fast, so long as I their master am with them. But the time will come, and that shortly, when I shall be taken from them; and then they will have occasions enough of mourning and fasting. And this he illustrated by several very pleasant and suitable similitudes.

Add to this, that the first miracle Christ is said to have performed, shewed he was no enemy to innocent mirth, and at the same time manifested his complaisance to his relations. There was a marriage celebrated in Cana of Galilee *, by some of Jesus's relations, and Mary the mother of Jesus was present at it. Jesus himself also being at this time in Galilee, with intent to choose disciples, was invited to the feast, with as many of his disciples as had begun at that time to follow him. Now it happened that the company being great, the wine that was provided for the entertainment fell short. Upon which Jesus's mother, concerned for her friends at this solemn occasion of rejoicing, went to Jesus privately, and told him that all the wine was out, intimating her desire, that as during the time of his retired life with his parents, she had sometimes observed him to exert his miraculous power in relieving the wants of his friends, so now upon an extraordinary occasion, he would be pleased miraculously to assist them. Jesus answered, I must tell you, mother, it doth not belong to you to choose or direct when or what miracles I should do. And besides, the time is not yet come, tho' it be very near, in which I shall confirm

firm the truth, by doing beneficent miracles indeed, for the relief of the distressed. And here really there is no such occasion. Nevertheless, I will not refuse to satisfy you in this expectation, and to do this office of civility to my kindred, in order to shew that I am no enemy to innocent festivity. Upon this, water being brought him by the servants, at his mother's orders, he immediately turned it into the purest and best wine. So that when the governor of the feast tasted it, he said to the bridegroom, Sir, we are extremely obliged to you for your generous civility. Usually men give their best wine at the beginning of a feast, and when the guests have drank a good deal, then they treat them with that which is worse. But you have entertained us all along with good wine, and that which we are now drinking is even manifestly better than any we have yet had. The bridegroom was surprized, and professed he knew nothing at all of it ; till at last the servants being examined, the miracle was discovered, and Jesus's extraordinary power was made manifest to the whole company.

I am far from thinking an excellent author not to be in earnest, or to speak ironically, when he remarks, " As for our Saviour's stile, 'tis not more vehement and majestic in his gravest animadversions, or declamatory discourses, than it is sharp, humorous and witty in his repartees, reflections, fabulous narrations, or parables, similies, comparisons, and other methods of milder censure and reproof. His exhortations to his disciples, his particular designation of their manners, the pleasant images under which he often couches his morals and prudential rules, even his miracles themselves (especially the first he ever wrought) carry with them a certain festivity, alacrity and good-humour so remarkable, that I should look upon it as impossible not to be mov'd in a pleasant manner at their recital."

Two only of all his miracles have any appearance of ill-nature, or did any hurt. All the rest were kindly and beneficent works. These two are the blasting the fig-tree, and sending the devils into the swine. And with regard to them, all we can say, till we come to consider the general end of his miracles, is, that it was by no means unnecessary, in order to gain attention to his doctrine, to give some instances of his power to curse as well as to bless ; and hardly could any works proper to serve that end be less hurtful than these two. Blasting a single fig-tree in that country was no great damage. And as for the perishing of the swine, the Gergesenes deserved to be punished for keeping those beasts, which were a snare and an offence to the Jews, their flesh not being permitted to be eaten.

Certain it is, that Christ delighted not in works of cruelty, but of mercy and goodness ; and employed his power in curing the diseased, and relieving the distressed. But to whom did he give the honour and glory of his power ? He did not assume it to himself, but rendered it to God. His doctrine he calls the doctrine of God. And to him does he ascribe all his gifts, all his power and knowledge. He sought not his own honour, but honour to God who sent him, and whose doctrine he taught. All he desired was to be believed and honoured as the Sent of God, or as his messenger to declare and execute his will, for the general good of mankind ; the messenger of God who sent him to be a light to the world, that the world might no longer lie in darkness, but have the light of life, the knowledge of the true God and true religion, and of the only way to eternal life, which is pure and sincere obedience to the laws of God : Those eternal laws of moral rectitude, which are immutable as God is, being founded upon the unchangeable nature of God himself, who is perfect truth, virtue and holiness. Thus he frequently

quently reasons* : “ I come not to do my will, but the will of God who is in heaven. My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. *i. e.* The doctrine which I teach, is not indeed a doctrine of human learning and wisdom : I have not studied or invented it, in hopes to become a celebrated preacher for pompous oratory, and learned subtilty in disputes, as the Scribes generally do, whose principal aim is the applause of men. But the doctrine which I preach is the plain doctrine of God, fitted not to please your curiosity, but to reform your hearts and lives, and communicated to me immediately from the Father, whose glory alone I seek, and not my own. Examine my doctrine impartially, and if it hath not the characters of truth, respect it not ; but if it carries with it all the marks of truth and of divine approbation, then receive it for his sake from whom it comes, and not for mine ; give the glory of it to him who sent me to declare it to you, and by whom I am assisted and directed in teaching it and confirming it. There are certainly marks and characters by which a candid examiner may easily discern whether a doctrine be of God or not. There is no man who lays aside partiality, and unreasonable prejudices, and who is disposed to believe whatsoever shall sufficiently appear to be the will of God, how contrary soever it may prove to men’s carnal and sensual lusts, but may easily be able to judge, from the very nature and tendency of a doctrine, whether it proceeds from God or not. A deceiver aims at nothing but popular applause, or worldly honours and advantages. If one speak of himself, he seeketh his own glory, and will take all the honour to himself. But what reason can you have to suspect one of imposture, or of any end a deceiver can have in view, who seeketh not his own glory, but the glory of

* John vii. 16. &c.

of God? Shew me any unrighteousness in my doctrine or life if you can: Any symptom of vain-glory or ambition, any worldly view in my conduct, any mark of any other aim whatsoever but the glory of God and the good of mankind, and then you effectually destroy my pretension. But take heed that ye reject not the truth, through prejudice, and contrary to all appearances. Judge righteous judgment. Look well into my doctrine; for I deliver nothing to you but what I am commissioned by God to teach *, and what God will abundantly justify and confirm. When you have vented your fury against me, and think you have effectually put an end to me and my pretensions, I tell you now beforehand, that soon after it will appear yet more evidently than it now does, that I have not gone about to deceive you, by pretending an authority which I have not; but that I have faithfully delivered a doctrine God sent me to teach."

We have already seen how he answered on one occasion, when he was accused of blasphemy, in equalling himself to God. And we are as expressly told, that when some gave him titles which he thought belonged to God alone, he corrected them, saying, Why callest thou me good, there is none good but God, the only true God. There is none good but one, that is God †. "The § Jews, 'tis said, sought to kill him, because he had broken the sabbath, and said also that God was his Father, making himself equal to God." We have already observed, how solidly he confuted the first article of this charge. And as for the latter he answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do: For whatsoever things he doth, these also doth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doth: And he will

* John viii. 26. † Mat. xix. 17. § John v. 18.

will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them ; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth the Son, honoureth the Father that sent him." Here we have the principal doctrine of Christ, and his own argument to confirm it. But we are not yet come to unfold and explain this reasoning. All we would at present observe is, that Christ sought not his own honour, but the glory of God, ascribing his doctrine, and all his power to confirm it, to God who sent him. For, if in this way of proceeding and reasoning, there be not all the marks of sincerity, self-denial, and true piety, what do these qualities mean? How can they shew themselves, or how can truth distinguish itself from imposture? Can we call this selfishness, vain-glory, arrogance, impiety? Or what is it that we would allow to be sincerity, candour, good-will to mankind, and pious respect to truth and the God of truth?

If the history of Christ be true, he certainly foresaw his death ; and he was daily persecuted in the cruelest manner. He neither had any worldly honours rendered to him, nor had he any prospect of them ; but on the contrary, he was daily affronted and vilified ; and he knew that he was to be crucified in the most ignominious manner. For so he forewarned his disciples, that they might not be offended at it. And indeed so candidly did he deal with them, that he forewarned them not only of his own sufferings, but of the sufferings they were to undergo for their adherence to him, and preaching his doctrine. He did not hide this from them, but expressly told them, " Ye shall be hated and persecuted of all men for my names sake." Promise not yourselves peace and prosperity, but lay your

account with the sword, with the cruelest persecution on my account. Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. Ye shall be delivered up to the councils, ye shall be scourged in the synagogues, ye shall be brought before kings and governors for my sake. But in all these fiery trials, ye shall be wonderfully comforted, emboldened and assisted. They have so male-treated and will so male-treat your Master ; and therefore wonder not if they so treat you his disciples. Fear them not,* but consider how blessed ye shall be if ye are faithful and endure to the end ; and speak out boldly all the truths I have told you in secret, for when my ministry is fulfilled, then will it be the proper time to preach my doctrines openly and fully ; for then shall you have the whole of my character and history, my death, resurrection and ascension to reason from, and abundantly confirm my doctrine by. If any man resolve to follow me, let him act a wise part, and count the cost before-hand ; let him not say he was seduced into it by fair speeches and flattering hopes. For I must be persecuted even unto death, and they who are to preach my gospel, or profess their faith in me, must resolve upon the severest trials, the cruelest male-treatment. They must resolve to suffer, not only to renounce all worldly comforts, but to undergo with true fortitude, the severest hardships and persecutions. Was not this fair, honest dealing* ? Is it likely that an impostor would have taken this method to gain followers ? Or if this conduct can be imagined to have proceeded from any other view but the religious and virtuous purpose Christ professed, what is it that could have distinguished the purest, the most disinterested, glorious design, from cunning, ambition, or hypocritical pretences to virtue, in order to carry on the more successfully, under that disguise, some very
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* Matt. viii. 19, 20.

opposite scheme? What could such a teacher or his followers have in their eye, but the promotion and advancement of the refined morals they taught, seeing they from the beginning laid their account with the most violent opposition, and were indeed from the beginning most barbarously used by those whose ambition, avarice and hypocrisy they detected, and to whose wicked enslaving designs, their doctrine was diametrically repugnant. For from the days of John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven, *i. e.* the gospel, from the time when it first began to be preached, suffered violence *, and the men of power harassed its preachers, tore it to pieces, or treated it and them in the most violent abusive manner. How can sincerity, honesty and virtue be made manifest, but by a continued course of sincere, candid and virtuous conduct? And whom can we call sincere, upright or good, if Jesus and his apostles were not such? Did they either seek power or riches? Did they not on the contrary, renounce all that the men of the world set their hearts upon, and despising poverty, calumny, persecution, the cruelest torments, persist boldly in reproofing vice, and preaching righteousness and a future judgment, in which God shall render to every one according to his works, whether they be good or bad? Jesus Christ taught, that true riches, as well as true merit, consists in being rich in good works, and in greatly contemning all the pomp, pageantry and luxury of this world. This he calls being *rich to God*, and *laying up treasures in heaven*, because 'tis only from such internal riches or treasures, that true happiness can be found in the future immortal life of our souls, when we shall be far removed from all the objects of sense. Never did any person recommend or inculcate in so strong a manner, the merit with God of public spirit and self-denial, and of true fortitude or magnanimity of mind? What was it, according to his

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doctrine,

* Matt. xi. 12. So the passage ought to be translated.

doctrine, that men ought solely to fear? It was not poverty or death, but vice, a guilty, a defiled conscience? And how powerfully doth he, on many occasions, set forth the contagious, corruptive nature of wealth. Nothing, saith he, is more difficult than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, *i. e.* for a rich man to walk humbly and moderately, and to prefer the arduous paths of virtue, to the soft dissolving pleasures of sense. Ease and affluence inflame many lusts and passions, which adversity quite extinguishes. 'Tis therefore harder to govern the mind, and keep the appetites in due order and discipline, amidst plenty of all sensual delights, than it is to bear adversity with patience and resignation.

Such is the deceitfulness of the love of riches, saith he *, that it is an exceeding hard thing (than which scarcely can any thing be imagined more difficult) for a rich man to become a worthy disciple of Christ, and to attain that resigned disposition of mind, and readiness to part with all things for the sake of religion, virtue, and a good conscience, which God requires. This was said by our Saviour upon a very remarkable occasion. A young man, of a religious disposition, hearing that Jesus taught the strictest piety and virtue, came to him saying, Good master, what excellent or extraordinary thing shall I do, whereby I may attain the eternal life which thou preachest? Jesus answered him, Why do you call me good, whom you do not know to be any other than a mere man? There is none truly good but God, who is the only author of all goodness and happiness; however, as to your question, you know what are the conditions and qualifications for eternal life: Keep the commandments of God. Then the young man asked what commandments? Jesus said, Not to commit murder, nor do wrong; not to commit adultery, nor fornication; not to steal, nor cheat and defraud

* Matt. xix. 26.

defraud any man ; not to accuse any one falsely, nor pervert justice ; to honour and reverence your parents, and all other superiors ; and to do to all men, as you would they should do to you, with equity and charity. The young man answered with great alacrity, hoping to be greatly commended by Jesus, All these commands have I obeyed from a child, what lack I yet ? Jesus replied, These are the necessary duties which God hath made the indispensable conditions of eternal happiness. But if you aim at a greater degree of perfection, and will do something excellent and extraordinary, then go sell all your estate, and give it to the poor, and come and follow me through afflictions and poverty, and laying aside all worldly affairs, apply yourself wholly to be a preacher of my gospel, and you shall have an extraordinary degree of reward in heaven. It does not appear but the young man might have done well, if he had gone away satisfied with Christ's first answer : So that our Saviour does not seem to have bidden him sell his estate, as a thing absolutely necessary to his *being a good man*, but only as a thing necessary *at that time*, to his being a *preacher of the gospel*, and that he might reprove his confidence, and have an occasion to represent to his disciples, the great danger and mischief of the love of riches.

Accordingly our Saviour enters immediately into the most serious reflections on the danger to virtue arising from prosperous circumstances, and the temptations which much riches occasion. Which, when his disciples heard, they seemed greatly concerned, and said, If the way of life be so very difficult, who then can be saved ? Jesus therefore looking upon them with a compassionate countenance, and pitying their anxiety, answered, 'Tis true that disposition of mind which the gospel requires, is so spiritual, so pure, and the provocations which affluence and prosperity minister to carnal lusts and appetites,
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are so many and great, that, morally speaking, 'tis hardly possible, in the ordinary course of things, for a very rich man to take his affections off from sensual pleasures, and set them wholly upon God and virtue : But God favours virtuous endeavours ; and therefore, if men exert themselves to make a good use of their wealth, and to overcome all temptations arising from ease and opulence, to pride, vanity, effeminacy and sensuality, they shall be enabled to make this noble conquest, and become eminent examples of virtuous self-denial, and truly disinterested benevolence.

But Jesus Christ not only taught that vice only ought to be feared, and that it is far greater to prefer virtue to all the pomp and pride of the world, than to possess the means of them in the greatest abundance. A Socrates, or an Epaminondas, was not a more eminent example of true magnanimity, and of generous contempt of all worldly riches and grandeur than Jesus Christ ? Many, indeed, imagined he was come to erect a temporal kingdom, and followed him a while on that account. But he expressly calls the kingdom he came to establish in the world, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven ; and he took every proper occasion to correct this mistake, and root out this prejudice. None who are acquainted with human nature can think such prejudices may be easily eradicated. It requires great art, very dextrous address, to enlarge gradually, narrow, contracted and prejudiced minds, and get the better of their false notions and prepossessions, and confirmed habits ; and our Saviour took the fittest method of correcting this prejudice, which was not to attack it directly, till he had first fully preached the nature of God, and of true religion, and shewn the preferableness of virtue to all worldly grandeur. When his followers were prepared for hearing of his sufferings and resurrection, then he tells them what was to happen to him,
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and how it behoved him to die, but that he was to rise again from the dead. Indeed when he first discoursed to his disciples of these things they were startled. Peter particularly, whose thoughts seemed to be fullest of worldly glory and greatness, was so disturbed at this discourse, that he could not forbear, but took Jesus aside, and expostulated with him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee." But Jesus turning about to him with displeasure, said, Have I been at so much pains to instruct you in just notions of true greatness, and do you yet entertain such false sentiments? Canst thou yet speak to me in this carnal strain? It grieves me. Your discourse favours not of the things of God, but of those that be of men. Your views seem to be yet carnal and worldly, not spiritual and divine. And upon this occasion, Jesus shewed unto them *how he must be perfected by suffering*, or the necessity of his suffering in order to compleat his ministry, and give full evidence of his divine mission, as well as a perfect example of virtue to the world; and plainly tells all present, that whoever would be his disciple, must be willing to follow his example, and to be also perfected by suffering: He must absolutely resign himself to the will of God, and renouncing all worldly desires, resolve both to do and suffer whatever God shall think fit to require of him. And pray, says he, what comparison is there between all the things this present world can afford, if any one could possess of them all, and the saving or losing a man's soul eternally? What valuable consideration can be given for a man's soul, the salvation of which must consist in his maintaining a sound mind and a good conscience, by adhering to God and virtue, in contempt of worldly honours or sufferings?

Jesus, after he had made himself known to his disciples, charged them not to publish in plain terms that he was the Messiah, till he should give
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them liberty to do it, when it was proper ; because he would not provoke the unbelieving Pharisees to apprehend him, before he had fulfilled his ministry, and because he would not give occasion to the multitude, who entertained false notions of the kingdom he was sent to establish in the world, to come together seditiously, and attempt to make him a temporal king : But chiefly, because it was most agreeable to his design of teaching true religion, confuting superstition, and giving a perfect example of virtue, that men should infer and conclude who he was, from the whole of his doctrine and life, when having suffered, and risen from the dead, he had ascended into heaven, and from thence had effused all necessary gifts upon those who were to make the first publication of the gospel to the Gentiles. For these, and other reasons already mentioned, he forbid those upon whom he had performed miraculous cures to proclaim them, at least till they had first made the offerings the Jewish law required, upon one's restoration to health, or purification from any polluting disease. For the same reasons did he charge those who were witnesses to his glorious transfiguration, not to say any thing of what they had seen till after his resurrection. It was proper that his design should gradually open and discover itself, in proportion as men were prepared to understand and receive it. And the pre-requisites to this were great regard to virtue, and spiritual notions of true grandeur and happiness. Those alone could understand or relish Christ's whole doctrine, who had first attained to just conceptions of this more essential part of it, that true happiness lies not in wealth, or outward power and splendor, but in the love of God and of mankind, and in the contempt of every thing that competes with virtue and a good conscience, or vainly promises us truer satisfaction than these can afford. Accordingly this was the doctrine our Saviour inculcated, and in proportion
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as this spiritual doctrine gained ground, did he speak out the sufferings he was to undergo, his resurrection, and the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God he was come to establish. When after he had often preached this doctrine, he perceived that some of his disciples still entertained a notion that he would after his resurrection, at least, appear in great pomp and glory to restore to the Jews a temporal kingdom *, then he found it necessary to correct this mistake more directly. And on such occasions we find him discoursing to this purpose : “ My kingdom is not, as ye fondly imagine, notwithstanding of all I have said, a temporal kingdom, consisting in earthly glory and greatness ; but it is a spiritual kingdom, consisting only in holiness and righteousness, and true piety, and in the spiritual rewards of these divine virtues. Places of dignity in it therefore are not to be expected by favour or affection, but are to be attained by humility, by patience and sufferings. Can ye therefore follow my example, in bearing patiently injuries, sufferings and death ? Salome the wife of Zebedee, with her two sons, to whom this discourse was directed, answered, We are able. Jesus replied, ye shall indeed follow me in persecutions and sufferings, and may thereby attain a place in my kingdom, and a share of the rewards of it : But for the chief seats of dignity and pre-eminence above others, this is not mine to dispose of by any absolute favour, but must be conferred upon those persons, and according to those conditions and qualifications which God hath appointed. Now, when the other apostles heard what these two brethren had desired, they were jealous for fear they should have been preferred before them. But Jesus called them all to him, and said, Ye have all a very wrong apprehension of the matter. In the kingdoms of this world, indeed men strive ambitiously to get the dominion one over another ;

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* Matr. xx. 22. &c.

and they who are greatest in riches and power have the greatest honour and respect paid them by others. But among you, he that desires to be great and honourable, let him seek to deserve his honour by meekness and lowliness, and let him exercise his power, not in domineering over any, but in assisting and doing good to all. He that desires to have the dignity and pre-eminence among you, let him be eminent for humility and readiness to serve all men. For I myself came not into the world to exercise power and dominion, to rule over men and to be served by them, but to serve, and assist and do good to all men, with all humility, meekness, and gentleness, and to lay down my life for the public and general good.

And to mention no more instances on this head, "When Jesus being brought before Pilate, was asked by him to this effect: Is it true what these men lay to your charge, that you have indeed attempted to set up yourself king of the Jews? Jesus answered, Have you ever, during your stay in this province, heard any thing of me that gave you any reason to suspect me guilty of secret practices and seditious designs against the government? Or do you only go upon the present clamour that is raised against me? If so, take heed you be not imposed upon, merely by the ambiguity of a word. For to be *king of the Jews*, is not to set up an earthly kingdom, in opposition to that of the emperor; but a thing of a very different nature. Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Can I tell what your expectations are, or in what superstitious senses you understand words? The rulers and chiefs of your own people, who are best judges of those matters, have brought you before me, as a riotous and seditious person: And if this be not the truth of the matter, pray let me know what is? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: The kingdom I have professed I would establish, is not a worldly one,

one, that any ways tends to give disturbance in the government. For if it had, my servants would have fought for me, and not suffered me to have fallen into the hands of the Jews. But to tell you the truth plainly, 'tis a kingdom wholly spiritual, consisting only in the submission of men's wills, and affections to the laws of God."

In the conduct of Jesus therefore, as there was no ambitious or worldly design; so neither was there any instance of the rashness and impetuosity of enthusiasm. But he opened his doctrine gradually, and prudently accommodated himself to the prejudices of mankind, in the way that was most proper for curing or changing them. We have many examples in his history, of his intrepidity in reprov- ing vice, and in persisting to teach virtue and true religion, in spite of abuse and persecutions of the most cruel outrageous kinds. But we have none of the wilfulness, and blind precipitant warmth and zeal which is the characteristic of enthusiasm, being indeed inseparable from it. Besides, enthusiasts in all ages have been generally more zealous about matters of opinion and forms of belief, than about morals. But our Saviour shewed a remarkable leni- ty to the Sadducees, who maintained the worst of errors, denying the spirituality of the soul and a future state, because they were regular in their lives; whereas he treated the superstitious Pharisees with some severity, who made a cloke of religious zeal for rites and ceremonies to hide their corrupt prac- tices, and tho' they believed a future state, yet placed the whole of sanctity, or at least the princi- pal part of it in external observances. And yet 'tis for want of attending to the genius of the lan- guage in which our Saviour spoke, that we are apt to look upon some of the terms he uses in reprov- ing them as too harsh, or which is worse, as an autho- rity for us to abuse any who differ from us in matters of opinion and faith. For 'tis well known, that the

phrase *children of the devil*, in that language, means no more than being exceedingly wicked, as *works of the devil* signify works of iniquity, works of injustice and oppression, under the mask of piety in particular. And our Saviour never calls any persons wicked, without specifying the wicked deeds on account of which they demerited that reproach.

We find nothing in the history of Jesus Christ, that hath the least appearance of affecting pomp or state. His whole life was a continued train of good offices to mankind, and of acts of the greatest humility. He condescended even to wash the feet of his disciples, to show them how lowly, gracious and condescending they ought to be, and how removed from pride and haughtiness *. How humble was even the only procession he made, that had the least shew of state, his journey to Jerusalem ‡, to mourn over it and to confirm his divine mission, by foretelling its destruction in a public manner, and in order to shew his displeasure against the profanation of the temple, and the encroachments thereby made upon the rights of the proselytes of the Gentiles, as hath been already observed. And in what did the whole solemnity of this journey consist? The disciples who came along with him from Galilee, when they drew near to the city, begun to express their joy in loud acclamations, praising God for all the mighty works they had seen. And they said, Blessed be he whom God hath sent to be our king and deliverer: Heaven prosper the kingdom of the Messiah, and establish it in peace and glory. Upon which some of the Pharisees which were in the company, said unto Jesus, Rebuke thy disciples. But he answered, If these should not give praise to God on this occasion, God would even work a miracle to raise up others to glorify his name, and acknowledge his power, and the fulfilment of the predictions of his prophets.

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* John xiii. 14. &c. ‡ Luke xix. 30, &c.

In what a moving manner doth he weep over Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou wast once the holy city, and the beloved of God, but thou hast often rejected God and persecuted his servants, and slain the prophets he sent to you, and thou hast continued obstinately corrupt and impenitent; how often has God tendered to thee the offers of mercy and pardon, and entreated thee to repentance with all the tenderness a father can shew his most darling child? But thou refused to hear. Behold now therefore, the time of mercy is past, and the final dissolution of the city and temple, with the fearful destruction of the Jewish nation, is unalterably fixed. And I assure you the time will speedily come, and is now at hand, when ye shall see me no more, who sincerely loved you, and would have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and then shall ye be forced to own me whom you now despise, to be indeed the Son of God and the Messiah."

How unjustly then is he accused of not having recommended patriotism, or the love of our country, who gave so strong an instance of his love to his native country, by taking so great pains to reform his compatriots from vice and superstition; and who thus wept over his country, from an affecting sense of its impending ruin: He who tho' the Jews reviled and stoned him with unrelenting fury, yet went about continually doing good to them, and exhorting them to amend their ways and turn to God: He who was a martyr to his zeal to promote their greatest good, and to their rage and indignation against every one who told them their errors and vices. How groundless and unreasonable is this charge, especially when we call to mind, that after having been persecuted during his most beneficial ministry, and at last crucified by them in the most unjust furious manner, he gave charge to his apostles, to whom he committed the preaching of his saluta-

ry doctrine, to begin by preaching it to the Jews; his ungrateful barbarous compatriots, who had so maltreated him, and rejected his doctrine with such virulence?

Equally groundless, my friend, is that other charge against the morality of Christ, that friendship is not recommended by it. For he chose but twelve persons to be his immediate and constant followers, and one of them he made his friend. John, who seems to have been by his temper peculiarly fitted above all the rest for friendship, is called the disciple whom Jesus loved, and he is regarded by the others as the person whom he always treated with the greatest intimacy and confidence; and with particular marks of that tenderness and affection in which friendship consists.

This is a sufficient vindication of our Saviour's doctrine and life, against these accusations: But it is well observed likewise on this subject, that there is generally, and there was at the time of our Saviour's appearance particularly, but little reason to insist much upon the love of one's country and friendship. For as partial attachments are generally more common than universal benevolence, insomuch that men in all ages of the world have been very apt to fancy themselves virtuous enough, when they are warm in their friendships, and have great zeal for their country, however inhumanly they may treat the rest of mankind, or however dissolute they may be in their lives: So amongst the Jews and Romans, when Christ appeared in the world, an affection for particular countries was really a nuisance; it did indeed triumph over justice and humanity. The Jews were so partially fond of their own nation, that they looked upon themselves as the only favourites of heaven, and were quite unsociable to all who were not of their own religion. And as for the Romans, their love of their country was really a spirit of rapine and conquest, and had led them to spread
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terror, ruin and slavery through the greatest part of the then known world. The proper lesson therefore to be inculcated at this time, or in such a state of things, was that universal goodness and benevolence, without which what is called zeal for one's country, is but cruel ambition and insatiable lust of universal dominion; and partial friendship is little better than the contracted, narrow, ungenerous union of pirates and robbers: For these public pests subsist by private confederacy, and a kind of friendship.

To all that hath been said of Christ's moral character, it may be added, that he did not teach men to extirpate their passions, as some pretenders to philosophy have absurdly done, but to moderate them. He exhorts us to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep. And such likewise was his practice. He sympathised in the most affectionate manner with the distressed, and his greatest joy lay in doing good, or in making others happy; in relieving men from their distresses, or comforting them under them. Upon proper occasions he shewed his indignation against vice in the firmest manner, as we have seen. But generally his censures and reproaches were of the mildest kind, and tho' sharp, yet pleasant. He never entertained resentment, or any thoughts of revenge against his bitterest enemies: And he died expressing his compassion, and praying for forgiveness to those who had most unjustly persecuted him even unto death. How divine are his last words! "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." Tho' he was not insensible of the violent pains he suffered, but was made to cry out by them, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Yet he quickly recollected his strength of mind, and died not only resigning himself chearfully to the will of God, which he was come to accomplish, but with the most affectionate wishes for mercy to his cruelest and most inveterate persecutors.

Thus,

Thus, my friend, I have laid before you some of the most remarkable discourses of Jesus Christ on moral subjects, and some of the more remarkable incidents in his life, in order to point out his Moral Character, and shew that he was, at least, one of the best of Philosophers, whether with respect to teaching, or what is a more powerful and engaging instructor than mere teaching, good example. For, as Pliny says, speaking of the excellent Emperor Trajan, *Nec tam imperio nobis opus, quam exemplo, & mitius jubetur exemplo.* We do not want precepts so much as patterns, and example is the softest and least invidious way of commanding. I do not mean to detract from the merit of a Socrates, when I say, I think Jesus Christ was nothing inferior to him, if not far superior, either in regard to the doctrine he taught, or his life and practice. And I think an apology for Christ, in imitation of Plato's noble apology for Socrates, *i. e.* the apology he makes Socrates speak for himself to his judges, a subject worthy of some Christian Pen equal for it. This I hope to find executed some day by you, my friend, when you have looked more carefully into Christianity than you have yet done; for of your impartiality I am fully convinced.

If what hath been said in answer to what you call *the previous question* with respect to Christianity, be in any degree satisfactory to you, I am willing to go on with you in the enquiry, and to develop to you what I take to be Christ's own argument for the truth of his mission and doctrine. 'Tis a very different one from that which is generally used by modern writers against Deism, as it is called. And a Person of your truly philosophical turn is such a convert to Christianity, as one who has a sincere regard to its interests cannot choose but be very desirous of gaining.

I am, &c.

PHILALETES.